

# Crabbing code of conduct

Recreational crabbing in Western Australia



This code of conduct provides guidelines on best fishing practices for recreational crabbing in Western Australia. The code encourages sustainable fishing behaviour and practices to ensure there will be plenty of crabs for the future.

The code covers:

- complying with size and bag limit regulations
- ensuring juvenile and berried females are not removed from the fishery
- maximising survival of released crabs and
- minimising impacts on the environment whilst fishing.

Together, these measures will help to safeguard crab abundance for future generations.

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# Recreational crabbing in Western Australia

Crabbing is an extremely popular pastime in WA. The most commonly caught species are blue swimmer crabs (*Portunus armatus*) and mud crabs (*Scylla olivacea*; *Scylla serrata*). In WA, blue-swimmer crabs are typically found from Port Hedland to Dunsborough, while mud crabs are typically found from Shark Bay to the Northern Territory border.

Recreational fishers can target all crab species from a boat (usually using drop nets) or the shore (either using scoops or collecting them by hand or using blunt crab hooks).



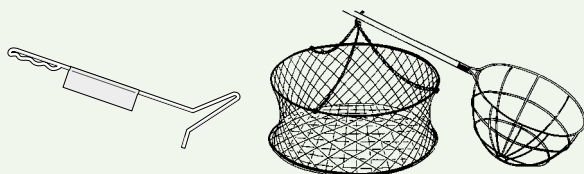
**Recreational fisher using a scoop net in Mandurah**

# Catching

- Be a responsible fisher. Make sure you understand the appropriate crabbing gear, closed areas, rules and banned activities before you head out.
- Do not scoop crabs that are obviously undersized.
- When diving for crabs, any crabs you put in your catch bag count toward your bag limit. Make sure you do not put more crabs than your bag limit in to your catch bag.

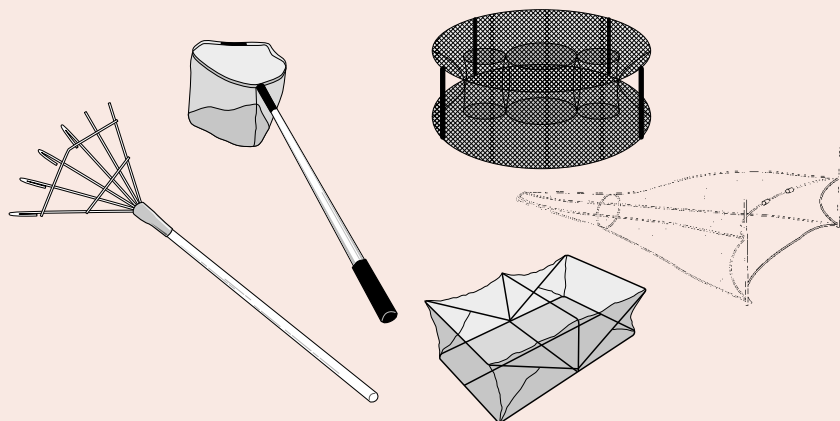
## Legal:

Wire hook, drop net or scoop net



## Illegal:

Crabbing rake, landing net, commercial type round trap, fishing nets, traps, prawn trawls or dip nets



# Identification

**Male**



**Female**



**Berried  
(egg-carrying)  
crabs**



Male crabs are bigger and more colourful than females, with rich blue on the legs and claws.

Female crabs are usually a mottled brown.

There is also a difference on the underside - the V-shaped abdominal flap on the male is narrow and angular, while a female's flap is broad and rounded.

Check for eggs and measure your crab as soon as they are caught, returning undersized and berried crabs to the water immediately and before attempting to catch another. Juvenile or berried crabs are protected to give them a chance to reproduce.



# Handling

- Keep count of your catch as you go and stop crabbing as soon as you reach your bag limit.
- Do not 'high grade' your catch. High grading is when people keep fishing for larger crabs, even after they have caught their bag limit.



**Crabbing in Peel Harvey Estuary**

- Minimise crab handling as much as possible, especially if it is undersized or berried.
- If necessary, crabs can be safely handled by holding their back swimming legs (swimmerets) to avoid getting pinched by their claws.
- Have a measuring gauge close at hand to measure crabs immediately after capture.
- Crabs that are kept out of the water for a period of time, even for as little as 10 minutes are not likely to survive when you release them.

# Releasing

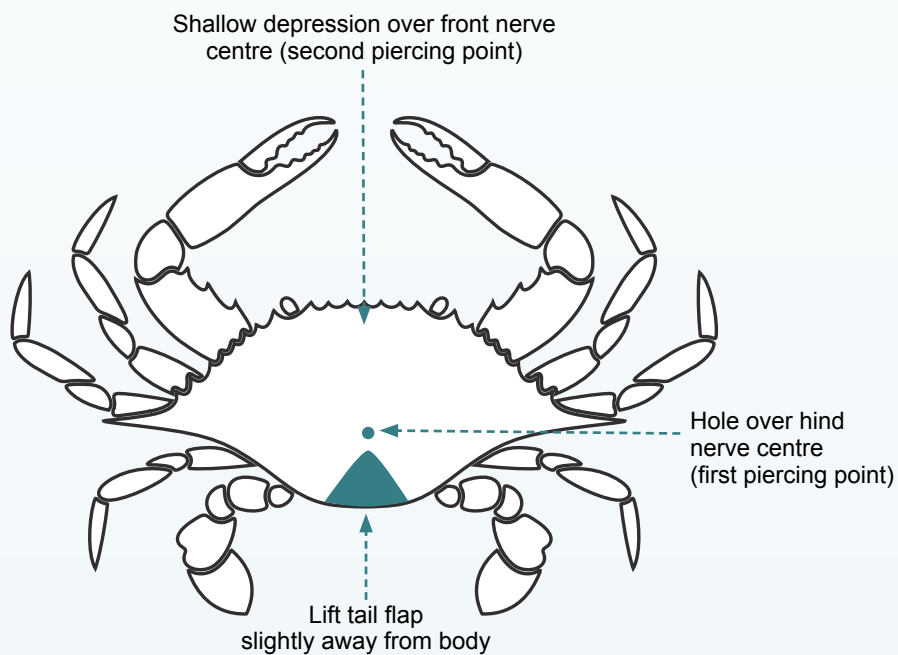
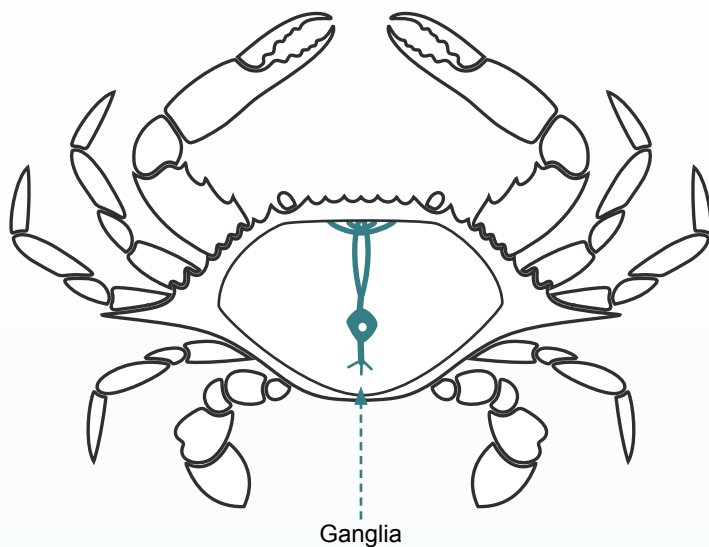
- Carefully and immediately return any undersized or berried crabs back into the water before attempting to catch another crab.
- Release crabs carefully, ideally by lowering the scoop back into the water, allowing the crab to swim away.
- If using drop nets, undersized or berried crabs must be returned before pulling the next drop net.
- If crabs that must be released are tangled in a drop net, or won't let go of a scoop net, place the drop/scoop net upside down in the water until they let go. Flinging crabs out of nets causes them to lose claws and/or legs, decreasing their chance of survival.

# Keeping crabs for consumption

- Minimise handling the crab prior to despatch, as this reduces stress.
- Crabs can be humanely despatched by:
  - piercing the two main nerve centres or
  - placing them in a freezer, or immersing in chilled water for up to 20 minutes.
- Crabs are best eaten fresh, so only keep enough for your immediate consumption.
- All uncooked crabs must be kept in whole form, unless being prepared for immediate consumption.
- We recommend that you remove the head, guts (mustard) and gills from blue swimmer crabs caught in the Swan and Canning rivers before freezing, cooking or eating them to avoid the risk of *Alexandrium* poisoning.
- We also recommend that you clean crabs caught in urban or industrial areas like Cockburn Sound as chemical contaminants including toxins can accumulate in seafood.

For more information visit **[dpird.wa.gov.au/incidents-and-alerts/aquatic-biosecurity-alerts/](https://dpird.wa.gov.au/incidents-and-alerts/aquatic-biosecurity-alerts/)**





# Responsible fishing

- Respect the environment and use established roads and tracks to access your crabbing spots.
- Throw all rubbish in bins. If there are no bins available, take it home with you for disposal.
- Avoid disturbing wildlife by getting too close, creating excessive noise, or allowing your crabbing activities to adversely interact with wildlife.
- If crabbing from the shore, keep your distance from birds you may see. WA supports many endangered, threatened and protected migratory bird species over the spring and summer months. These birds need to gain weight for their migration to the northern hemisphere and disturbing them may reduce their chances of a successful migration.
- If crabbing from a boat, slow down if you see any large animals (such as dolphins and dugongs) near the surface. They are vulnerable to being struck by boats.
- Anchor on a sandy bottom, not on seagrass beds.
- If you see a bird or other animal requiring assistance please call Wildcare Helpline 08 9474 9055.

## Safety

- Always check weather conditions before you go crabbing.
- If you can, go crabbing with another person.
- If you cannot swim, avoid going in the water.
- If boating for crabs, wear a lifejacket while on board.
- Wear appropriate gear when crabbing. We do not recommend wearing waders whilst scooping for crabs.
- If using drop nets, make sure floats are visible and not in boating channels.

# Pest species

Pests and diseases pose a serious threat to WA's aquatic environment, as well as the tourism, aquaculture and fishing industries.

If you catch or spot a pest species, such as the Asian Paddle Crab, you must not release this back into the waterway. Despatch it humanely and dispose of it away from the waterway to avoid possibility of spreading diseases.

Make sure to contact FishWatch on 1800 815 507 to report sightings of pest species.

## Follow the rules

You can play your part to ensure we have fish for the future by fishing responsibly and abiding by the recreational fishing rules.

It's easy to keep up to date with WA's recreational fishing rules online at **[dpird.wa.gov.au/recfishing](http://dpird.wa.gov.au/recfishing)**, in the **Recreational fishing guide**, or the handy **Crabbing for blue swimmer crabs guide**, available in several languages.

The Recfishwest App is another easy way to access WA's fishing rules even if you're out of phone range. The Recfishwest App is free to download from the Apple App Store and Google Play and has a useful Fish ID function to help identify any unfamiliar species.



Report any illegal fishing activities to FishWatch on 1800 815 507 or online at **[crimestopperswa.com.au/organisation-report/](http://crimestopperswa.com.au/organisation-report/)**

# Contact us

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**Scan to view our video** on  
Mandurah Blue Swimmer Crabs,  
how to handle and measure.

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